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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO
CONSOLIDATE GAINS, CONTEST ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 3506

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Classified By: By Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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Summary

11. (C) During a November 5 meeting, the Ambassador pressed four Christian leaders to consolidate the gains from the November 3 Article 50 vote and avoid the Sunni disaster of 2005 by not boycotting the upcoming provincial elections. The Ambassador acknowledged that the paucity of seats allocated to minorities by Article 50 as passed was a disappointment to the USG but stressed the need for Christians to set aside their differences, contest the elections, and move forward. In November 7 meetings with President Talabani and VP Al-Mahdi, the Ambassador urged the Presidency Council to sign off on the new legislation as quickly as possible; emboffs have vigorously pressed other contacts to do the same. The four leaders expressed concern over the future for Christians in Iraq, particularly in light of the recent killings and intimidation of Christians in Mosul and what they perceive as past GOI negligence in protecting Christians. The leaders said they were unclear who was behind the violence in the north, but the Ambassador said the USG view was that Al Qaeda, taking advantage of the complicated political environment, was responsible. Bishop Wardouni raised the issue of compensation for MNC-I's occupation of Chaldean Church properties and his concern about security for the facilities once MNC-I leaves. The Ambassador assured him of US commitment to the security of the property. End Summary.

Frustration Over Too Few Seats

12. (C) On November 5, the Ambassador met with Chaldean Auxiliary Bishop Shlaimon Wardouni, Christian parliamentarians Younam Kanna and Ablahad Afram Sawa, and Non-Muslim Endowments Director Abdullah al-Naufali. Bishop Wardouni, who is Chaldean Patriarch Cardinal Emmanuel Delly's representative, launched into a bitter denunciation of the Council of Representative (CoR) November 3 passage of a Provincial Elections Law (PEL) that gives Christians only single seat quotas in Baghdad, Ninewa and Basrah (reftel). Wardouni lamented that Christians, the "original inhabitants of Iraq," were being treated as though they do not exist. According to Wardouni, after Article 50 had been excluded from the PEL passed on September 24, Christians had appealed to the highest levels of the GOI, to UNAMI, the USG, Grand Ayatollah Sistani, the Sadrist bloc, and tribal sheikhs -- all of whom agreed that Article 50 should be reinstated. Wardouni was adamant that Christians should reject the PEL as voted and demand greater rights.

13. (C) Both Chaldean Democratic Union Party (Kurdish

Alliance) leader Ablahad Afram Sawa and Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) leader Younadam Kanna espoused the view that CoR members and other senior GOI officials conspired to defeat an Article 50 that would have allowed three-seat quotas for Christians. Kanna said he was lied to by senior GOI officials, including President Talabani and Vice President Al-Mahdi, and that Article 50 was ultimately sabotaged by KDP member Mohsin Sa'adoun (Kurdish Alliance). Sawa claimed that all protestations of support for minority rights and quotas were only lip service and that Christians were deceived by everyone, including SRSG de Mistura and CoR Speaker Mashadani. According to Sawa, boycotting the upcoming elections would be better than accepting the single-seat quotas. In contrast, Al-Naufali commented that the problem stems from the Christians' own disunity, and urged his co-religionists to convey a unified message. (Note: At the conclusion of the meeting, Kanna handed the Ambassador a copy of a letter to the Presidency Council signed by both Sawa and himself. The letter deplores the PEL as passed on November 3 and characterizes the legislation as degrading and insulting to the minorities concerned. It further requests the Presidency Council to veto the PEL and return to the original formulation (three seats for Christians in Baghdad, three in Ninewa, and one in Basrah) or do away with this "shameful quota" all together. End Note).

14. (C) The Ambassador assured his interlocutors that the U.S. would have preferred a different outcome to the Article 50 vote. However, noting that the principle of guaranteed minority representation is now established, he said it is important for Iraq's Christians to seize on the gains and move forward. The Ambassador stressed that a boycott of the provincial elections is not in anyone's interest, citing the Sunnis' disastrous experience in the 2005 elections. He urged the Christians to unify and set aside some of their

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differences to achieve the common interests of the community. Boycotting the elections, the Ambassador stressed, would only marginalize the community further.

15. (C) In separate meetings on November 7, the Ambassador urged President Talabani and VP Abel Al-Mahdi to sign off on the legislation as soon as possible. The Ambassador noted that he had met the previous day with the Papal Nuncio, who had made the Vatican's position clear: the Vatican supported the bill -- one minority seat for Ninewa Baghdad, and Basrah -- as passed by the COR. Embosffs have followed up these conversations with similar demarches to UNAMI and other GOI contacts.

Mosul Security Improved--But How Long Will It Last?

16. (C) Bishop Wardouni deplored the GOI's past negligence in providing adequate security for Christians in Mosul, who fled in large numbers after a series of killings in early October. Wardouni said Mosul's Christians were relieved when the GOI did finally send security reinforcements, but he wondered how long they would remain. Wardouni noted that the Bishop's Councils of Mosul and Iraq were pleased that an estimated 500 to 600 Christian IDP families had returned to Mosul. He added there had been attempts -- he did not say by whom -- to offer the IDPs money to stay in the villages where they had taken refuge. Kanna voiced suspicions that elements of the Iraqi forces in Mosul were themselves involved in the violence, adding that the GOI need to be pressured more on security for Christians. Sawa commented that the reasons for the Mosul violence and displacement of Christians were unclear, and the GOI was not offering any explanation.

17. (C) The Ambassador said that information available to the USG indicated that Al-Qaeda, taking advantage of the complicated political situation, was responsible for the Mosul killings. PM Maliki's response -- ordering an investigation and sending additional troops -- was positive

and suggested that changes would be made with regard to security measures in Mosul. When asked if he was satisfied with the current increase in security, Wardouni replied yes, but expressed concern that the extra forces might eventually be reduced. The Ambassador assured him that the U.S. believes the additional Iraqi Army units should remain in Mosul and would remain in close touch with the GOI.

MNC-I's Departure From Babel College

18. (C) Wardouni said when MNC-I forces began to use a Chaldean Church property, Babel College, in the Doura area of Baghdad as billeting in March 2007, Muslims accused Christians of collaborating with the "occupiers." According to Wardouni, the Church never received any compensation from the U.S. Army for damages and now the MNC-I has begun to leave the premises. Fearing that Muslims will loot and destroy everything as soon as MNC-I is gone, Wardouni said that if nothing is done by the USG to secure the property, he will air his grievances publicly. Kanna expressed surprise at hearing that MNC-I was leaving so soon, and suggested that the Sahwa (Sons of Iraq--SOI) forces in the area could be asked to step in to protect the property. He added that the Iraqi Army could eventually assume security responsibility for the Church properties. The Ambassador assured Wardouni that the embassy would follow up to ensure the security of the premises and that strong liaison and communication existed between Christian leaders and the U.S. military, to their satisfaction. (Note: On November 6, Baghdad 1 e-PRT leader reported that Wardouni had met with him and U.S. military authorities the same day and agreed to recommend to Cardinal Delly that the Chaldean Church sign a lease for the period of U.S. Army occupancy at Babel College to include rent and responsibility for repairs on the building as well as a claim submitted under the Claims Act for compensation for the building's contents. Wardouni acknowledged that U.S. forces are leaving, requested that the surrounding T-walls be left in place, and agreed that custody of the walls should be transferred to the Ministry of Interior. Wardouni will make arrangements for the SOI to provide interior security; ISF will provide exterior security. Further details will be addressed after Wardouni consults with Delly. End note.)

19. (C) Al-Naufali noted that the Non-Muslim Endowments Office (NME) has 650 security guards for all non-Muslim houses of worship in Iraq -- not even 25 percent of the number needed to provide adequate security. The NME is able to provide security only for Baghdad churches and some Sabaeen-Mandaean and Yezidi houses of worship. According to al-Naufali the NME does not lack funds to maintain and renovate churches and other religious sites; the problem is non-availability of engineers and trained technical staff.

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Wardouni noted that the NME had submitted to PM Maliki and Deputy PM Barham Salih many requests detailing security needs for non-Muslim religious sites, but had never received a response. He added that protecting the aforementioned Babel College would require 30-40 guards alone. The Ambassador indicated that he supported their requests for additional guards for churches and other non-Muslim religious sites.

Comment

110. (C) While the leaders of the minority communities are indeed upset with the reduced number of seats for minorities, they have not yet made a decision to boycott the provincial elections. Press reports indicate that the Presidency Council will approve the new legislation very soon, but such a move will likely only increase the ire of leaders such as we met with on November 5, who are digging in their heels on the threat of a boycott. Such a move would be extremely short-sighted, and we continue to reach out to minority contacts to urge them to avoid a step that would only serve

to undermine the relevance and stature of the minority
communities in Iraq.
CROCKER